

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #19 – Tsering Methok
June 29, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #19
2. Interviewee: Tsering Methok
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Tsona Yama Dong
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 29, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's residence, Camp No. 1, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Tsering Methok comes from the village of Tsona, which is very close to the Indian border. As a young girl, she played games, helped her mother in weaving and did household chores. She describes *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year' celebrations and *cham*, special dances performed by monks.

Tsering Methok's life changed when her family witnessed many Tibetans escaping through their village, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Tsering Methok remembers working with the other villagers to clear a path for His Holiness by digging earth and covering the snow with soil.

Tsering Methok's parents decided to also flee their homeland with her and her four siblings. When they reached India, her family begged for food and worked on road constructions at Mon Tawang. Tsering Methok's younger brother joins the interview and describes the dangers of road construction and how they cleared thick forests to build the Tibetan refugee settlement in Bylakuppe, India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, herding, religious festivals, first appearance of Chinese, Dalai Lama's escape, early life in Bylakuppe, life as a refugee in India.

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Age: 75, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: June 29, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #19, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

#19: Yes. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped from Tibet, he spent one night at our monastery, the Tsona *Gonpa* 'monastery.' At Tsomo Nyariyamtso when the bodyguards and the army were escorting His Holiness, the Chinese airplanes flew. So His Holiness said, "Let us not all go together. Let's scatter. The Chinese may fire on us." The plan was to spend two nights at our monastery, but fearing that the Chinese might arrive, he spent just one night.

Q: Is that a nunnery or a monastery?

#19: There were many monks there.

Q: That was not a nunnery?

#19: The nunnery was on the west side. There were two monasteries, one for nuns and the other for monks.

Q: Did they find out about that afterwards?

#19: His Holiness the Dalai Lama spent one night at the monastery.

Q: Was she there in Tibet at that time?

#19: Yes, I was there in Tibet. It was winter and the water had turned to ice. So all the people dug earth and spread it on the path of His Holiness. We also removed the snow from the road. We did like that. Then His Holiness went towards the Monpa's land [ethnic group in southern Tibet/northern India]. From Mon Tawang, he left for...

Q: Was she one of them? Did she see His Holiness' procession?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She worked for that also.

Q: She worked for that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She worked in making the way for His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Did she see him pass by?

#19: Yes, we saw that. He was not in monk's robes. He was wearing a knitted cap and a yellow scarf. His brown dress was made of *gonam* 'serge' with fur on the inside. On his feet, he wore long boots which were yellow in color.

Q: This was when he was leaving Tibet?

#19: At that time when he was leaving Tibet, I heard he was around 23 years of age. He was very young.

Q: First of all, I'd like to know, did they know that he was leaving Tibet when they saw him pass by?

#19: If one went from Tsona, you came to Lebo as called by the Monpas and from there to Mon Tawang. One couldn't ride as there were mountain passes and His Holiness went on foot. From Mon Tawang to Missamari and you were in India.

Q: Did she know His Holiness was escaping to India?

#19: We did not know that he was escaping. We came to know about it only after he'd left. The bodyguards and the army were escorting him. All the people stood by the roadside to see him. We had covered the ice on the road with soil. In Tibet, there was much snow, so we cleared the snow from the road.

Q: Can she describe what it was like when he passed? What was the feeling amongst the crowd of people who saw him? Can she describe what it was like?

#19: The old people fainted and everyone cried. Even though we were small, we cried because the old people cried. [Cries] The old people became sad and refused to eat. Three or four days after His Holiness left for India, all the people escaped.

Q: Tell her thank you so much for making the way safe for His Holiness.

#19: Some old people and those with many little children were left behind in Tibet. Those who did not have many children were able to escape.

Q: Please tell her thank you for making the way safe for His Holiness to come.

#19: We got a very good chance of seeing him.

Q: Did she have anything else to say about that event?

#19: I don't have anything more to say.

Q: Now we'd like to go back in time to her childhood and to her village Tsona Yamadong. If she could tell us, what did her village look like?

#19: Just like we have Camp Number 1, 2 and 3 here, in Tsona we also had many villages: Gyepa, Chulung, Womo, Chapo, Laplung, Gondo Shiwa and below the monastery, there lived many families.

Q: What was the environment like? Were there mountains around? Was there a river? What did the environment look like?

#19: Let me explain. It was said that *Tsongpon* 'Trader' Norbu Sangpo [a legendary man] and the father of a taxpayer family of Tibet played a game of dice. As they didn't have money to keep as a stake, the taxpayer agreed to provide grass to *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo if he lost. The taxpayer lost the game and he cultivated a forest land and there was no water for irrigation, so we have a kind of black barley.

Q: Black rice?

#19: Black barley. Barley to make *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.'

Q: Who were the two people who played the game of dice?

#19: *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo and a father from Tsona, a father of a family who worked in lieu of tax for the Tibetan government.

Q: They played a game of dice and what happened?

#19: They played a game of dice and the taxpayer father lost, so he had to cultivate a forest land. *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo won and he had many horses and mules to graze. He had come to Tsona for trade and camped at a place. There was a fireplace and the story goes that when his animals were grazing, a tiger came there. Then *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo prayed and used his slingshot. The stone from the slingshot was a huge one which had the footprints of all his animals.

Q: Is this story related to the formation of her village?

#19: There were three stones used for cooking and it used to be said that *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo camped there and cooked his food and made tea. On the way, a tiger or some predator came to attack his horses and mules, so *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo used his slingshot. The stone from the slingshot had the footprints of many animals. It was said that *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo was a manifestation of the Buddha.

Q: Are those things still there in her village?

#19: Yes, they are.

Q: Has she seen them?

#19: No, I haven't. I have seen the stones used for cooking. There was a stone box which was said to have been the cash box of *Tsongpon* Norbu Sangpo. You could open the stone and it made a sound. When you closed it, it made a sound. Such things were there in Tsona.

Q: What about her family? How many people lived in her house with her?

#19: My son is an artist and daughter a teacher at the Tibetan Children's Village School.

Q: How many family members were there in Tibet?

#19: When I was living in Tibet, my parents were dead.

Q: We are talking about that time, the early times.

#19: My sister came here and died. My oldest brother is here.

Q: How many family members were there when she was in Tibet?

#19: There were my parents and four children.

Q: The four children were boys or girls?\

#19: There were two girls. The oldest girl died.

[Brother of interviewee prompting her off camera]: They are asking about when we were in Tibet. Say that there were three sons and two daughters.

Q: When you were living in Tibet, how many family members did you have?

#19: There were three sons and two daughters. The oldest daughter is dead.

Q: And where was she in that?

[Brother prompting]: Say that you are the third child.

#19: I am the third one.

Q: Did she have a happy childhood? Can she talk about her childhood a little bit and her family?

#19: I was happy because at that time my parents were alive. Even coming to India, we are happy thanks to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: What did she like to do as a child? What are some of her favorite things to do?

#19: When we were living in Tibet, we used to spin wool and weave cloth. We used to sell the cloth to the Bhutanese and Monpas. That was how we earned our livelihood.

Q: Did she have anything here that she weaved at that time?

#19: My late mother used to weave. I did not know how to weave. I do not have any things to show.

Q: When she wasn't working, what were some of her favorite things she did for fun?

#19: When we were in Tibet, the little children who did not know to work would play skipping. The vultures' feathers were colored and we played hacky-sack, counting the number of hits. In Tibet we had vultures, whose feathers were used and at the bottom, we placed a coin and then played hacky-sack.

Q: Ask her was she good?

#19: Yes, I was and we used to keep bets. We didn't have money, so it was a slap on the hand for the loser.

Q: What was the skipping rope made out of?

#19: The rope was made out of wool. In Tibet we had many sheep and yaks. So the ropes were made of wool.

Q: Did she go up into the hills around her village? Did the kids have a lot of freedom to kind of go up around in the hills?

#19: No, we did not go.

Q: Were there dangerous animals there?

#19: There were wolves. If one did not look after the sheep carefully, the wolves would take them. There were no other predators.

Q: Did she ever see any wolves?

#19: Yes, I have seen wolves. Their tails were down, their ears stood up like the Alsatian dogs and they had long snouts.

Q: Was she frightened?

#19: Yes, I was, but they lived in the forests and did not come down to the plains often. If the shepherds did not watch their flocks, the wolves would take them.

Q: What did they use, the people that were protecting the sheep? What would they use to keep the wolves away?

#19: There was no one who looked after the wolves. They lived in the forests.

[Question is repeated]

#19: The shepherds had slingshots woven from wool. The slingshot was long with two ends and in the center there was a flat square part in which a stone was placed and then the slingshot was rotated and fired. When it was rotated [gestures] and one end dropped, the stone fired.

Q: How old was she when she started doing the spinning with her mother?

#19: I might have been about 13 or 14 years old.

Q: Did her mother teach her how to do it?

#19: Yes. First we had to flatten out the wool and run a brush through it. We had a wooden instrument, around which we wound the wool and made thread. [Shows with gestures]

Q: What kind of items were they making?

#19: We made *chupa* ‘Tibetan dress,’ pants and blankets.

Q: Then they would take them and sell in Bhutan?

#19: We would weave woolen cloth and the Bhutanese and Monpas came to buy the materials for making their attire.

Q: Can she just talk a little bit more about her childhood and the other memories that she has? Just see if she can do it by herself without prompting her all the time? If she could just talk a little bit more about her childhood and the family and just see what happens. These are the kinds of things we are interested in.

#19: This is about it. I have nothing more to say.

Q: Ask her about her friends. Does she remember her friends?

#19: Yes, I had friends. Some have come here and some were left behind.

Q: Did she ever get in trouble when she was a kid?

#19: No, I have never faced that.

Q: Ask her about what her mother was like?

#19: The rich people had many sheep, but since we were poor we did not have many animals. We had two or three cows and a pair of bullocks to plough the fields.

Q: Ask her if she remembers any occasions, celebrations when the villagers would get together and if she can describe that.

#19: No, I don't have anything to say.

Q: She doesn't remember anything or...?

#19: I have nothing to say. That is it.

Q: Does she remember any *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year'?

#19: On the first day of the New Year, a son and a daughter who have living parents go around all the houses to sample *chema* 'tsampa offering.' It is considered good for children whose parents are living to do that. The families, whose houses they go to give them money as gifts.

Q: Has she done that?

#19: At that time both my parents were living, so I did that. After sampling the *chema*—in Tibet we used to prepare *changkue* 'warm home-brewed beer'—we drank *changkue*, which had *khapse* 'pastry made of fried dough' in it.

Q: She drank the *changkue* at her house?

#19: We were given that by the families we visited.

Q: Did she enjoy that?

#19: Yes, they were delicious. We were given *changkue* and also *desi*, 'rice mixed with sugar and butter.' Since we didn't have sugar in Tibet, *jaggery* 'brown candy' and butter were used.

Q: What was her favorite thing to eat?

#19: The most common food in Tibet was *pa* 'tsampa balls.'

[Question is repeated]

#19: In Tibet, we always ate *pa* made from barley flour.

Q: That is what you commonly ate. What was your favorite food?

#19: The Bhutanese and the Monpas brought millet which we ground into flour and then cooked. We also cooked cheese and green chilies. We used to make stale cheese too. We did not have much rice as it was found only in the lands of the Bhutanese and the Monpas.

Q: Was that tasty?

#19: It was tasty. If you ate the millet dish, you did not feel hungry for a longer period. If you had rice, you felt hungry sooner.

Q: So ask her about the local *Gonpa* ‘monastery’ and the monks there. Did they go out there ever?

#19: Regarding the monasteries, Jampa Tashi [interviewee's brother] can say more. I have mentioned the two monasteries earlier. They are mentioned in there in the note I gave you.

Q: We'll read that later. Thank you for giving that to us, but we'd like you to tell us.

#19: [Asking her brother] When was it when we used to have the *cham* ‘religious performance by monks’ at our monastery in Tibet?

[Brother of interviewee]: It was during *Gaden Ngamchoe* [the 25th day of the 10th Tibetan Lunar month].

#19: We had the *cham* performance by the monks for three days. They made a corpse out of dough and the performers called *Dhuetoe Tham* wore white caps and all white attire with long fingernails. Then four *Dhuetoe Tham* carried the corpse and placed it there. A performer called Ashang Choekyi Gyalpo [the Lord of Death], dressed in yellow with a yellow cap came and made pieces of the corpse. There were nine *cham* performers who carried wooden bowls. They had on different masks. Then Ashang Choekyi Gyalpo gave a small piece to each of them.

Q: Ask her what she thought about that when she saw that when she was little?

#19: That was the first performance. The second was the *thorgya*, during which *torma* ‘dough offerings’ were burned in a stack of hay. The men who were taxpayers wore *sosha* ‘a type of hat’ and danced. Guns were fired during the *thorgya*. When the *torma* were thrown into the fire, guns were fired.

Q: Did everyone cheer when that happened?

#19: All the people had just come to watch. The men who were taxpayers did the *thorgya* and they performed, carried a knife and danced in the arena.

Q: What else did she remember?

#19: On the third day, the lama gave *Tsedup Kawang* ‘long life empowerment’ for the public. Many people arrived; the Monpas, Jora Khatas and traders.

Q: It was a *Gelug* monastery?

#19: Yes, it was *Gelug*.

Q: Ask her what else she remembers about this?

#19: I can't remember anything else. That's about it.

Q: Do you have anything to say about the nunnery?

#19: There were many nuns. The temple was there and all around it were the dormitories. Right in the center was a water spring. The water came out of the spring and a wooden channel was put there through which they collected water. The nunnery was on the hill.

Q: Did she know any of the nuns there at the nunnery?

#19: We used to invite nuns home to perform prayers. We invited monks as well as nuns to do *pooja* ‘rituals of worship’ at our homes.

Q: Did the nuns live differently to the monks? The way that the nuns lived, was it different to the monks?

#19: No, there was nothing different.

Q: The nunnery was like quite small?

#19: The monks' monastery was larger than the nunnery.

Q: Did the nuns have an abbess?

#19: Yes, there were *Khenpo* ‘abbess,’ *gekoe* ‘disciplinarian’ and *omze* ‘chant master.’

Q: And the nuns, did they do retreats? Does she know?

#19: There were some who went into retreats.

Q: When did she start to notice the Chinese in her area?

#19: I don't know the year.

[Brother of interviewee]: Around 1947to 1948.

Q: Is this her brother?

[Brother of interviewee]: I am the younger brother.

Q: Would he like to join us?

[Brother of interviewee]: Okay.

[From here onward Tsering Methok's statements will be “#19” and Jampa Tashi's as “#19 JT”]

Q: Just tell him because for legal reasons, if we have permission to use his interview for the Tibet Oral History Project?

#19 JT: There is no objection.

Q: Does he have anything to add to any of the things we were asking about earlier?

#19 JT: It was around 1945, ‘46, ‘47 when we heard that the Chinese were going to come to our village. When we heard that, though we were little children, we used to be terrified. I don’t know why but we were terrified, and at that time, they did come; there were some soldiers. Then later they selected children in the age group of 12 to 15 to admit into schools. They said that the children should be sent to school. They selected a child from each of the villages and took them to Tsethang and Lhasa.

Q: Was he afraid that he might be taken?

#19 JT: Yes. First when we heard that the Chinese were coming, even before I saw them, I was terrified. When they came, I saw that we were of the same race, but since they were soldiers I was scared of them. Those children who reached Lhasa, some of them voluntarily said upon enquiry that they wanted to go to China because they were young and ignorant, thus many were sent to China.

Q: How did their life in the village change when the Chinese came? How did life change in the village?

#19: We had never seen Chinese and when they came, everyone was afraid. They channeled water to the fields at the sides and planted vegetables. They grew huge radishes, fertilizing them with the excrement of animals and humans.

#19 JT: The soldiers did that.

Q: And that was unusual? What's that got to do with the Chinese in the village?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Actually they grew this vegetable. The radish was very big.

Q: And what else? Were their lives affected at all?

#19 JT: There was no change in the ways of our livelihood. We were very close to the border. We were toward Lhoka.

#19: We were near Monpa, near India.

Q: Why did they decide to leave?

#19 JT: In the years 1947, '48 and '49, we heard that the Chinese were oppressing the people in the Kham regions. In those days, we did not have newspapers, but we heard the news from Lhasa. We heard that in the Kham regions, battles were being fought and such things. Then by 1959, they [the Chinese] were in Lhasa. When they came to Lhasa, many soldiers [resistance fighters] from Kham and the Tibetan government's army could not defeat them and Lhasa was lost and they destroyed it.

Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama came toward Lhoka. Our village Tsona was on the way. Our village made some preparations like readying horses and making bridges. His Holiness then went on to India through our village. Then from the north, numerous people of Lhasa started pouring in. Even though the weather was so cold in winter, people were escaping.

We were living at the border and thought it was not the right thing to remain there as we were fearful. Lhasa was lost and countless people were fleeing, so we also escaped. Some left behind their aged parents, some could not bring along their children because of the fear that the Chinese would kill them [the adults]. So that was how we fled into India.

Q: Was that a very difficult decision to leave?

19 JT: Yes, we had to flee because it was a matter of our lives, so we escaped to India.

Q: Does he also remember when His Holiness passed through on his way to exile?

#19 JT: I can remember. The road from Tsona to Tawang was so bad; His Holiness could not ride on the horse. He had to ride a yak, which were accustomed to walking carefully on such paths. A person led the yak His Holiness rode. The way was very steep and horses and mules could not go. So His Holiness rode on the yak.

Q: Did he see this?

#19 JT: Yes, I did.

#19: When the path was extremely bad, His Holiness was not on the yak, but he walked.

#19 JT: It was difficult to recognize him because he was in layman's clothing. But when he was on the yak led by a person, we knew he was His Holiness because all the rest were walking. That's how we knew him.

Q: Did His Holiness keep going or did he stop a little?

#19 JT: No, he didn't stop.

#19: The officials would have received blessings, but the people didn't.

#19 JT: It was an emergency and His Holiness did not have time to relax.

Q: Did people run with *khatas*?

#19 JT: Some were standing with *khata* 'ceremonial scarves,' but since His Holiness had on attire like everyone else, they could not recognize him. Later when they reached the difficult part of the way, while the retinue walked, His Holiness rode the yak, so people could recognize that that was His Holiness. Otherwise, no one knew. His Holiness' passage was an emergency and a secret, so preparations were not elaborate.

#19: The officials had *khata* with them, but the public did not.

Q: Did they remember their journey to India?

#19 JT: That we can remember. When we reached Mon Tawang, we did not have anything to eat and went begging in the villages. We faced acute scarcity of food. After a month or two, the Indian government gave us road construction work. We made driving roads and the Indian government paid us wages. In this way, we went on for a year or two.

Q: He went begging in Mon Tawang?

#19 JT: Yes, we had to. We left home all of a sudden and did not have enough to eat on the way.

#19: We were so scared that we could bring only *tsampa* and nothing else.

#19 JT: When so many people gathered at one place, we had to beg.

#19: We had only the clothes we wore. We could not carry any of our things in the house which were left behind. We only brought a small quantity of *tsampa* and butter to eat on the way.

#19 JT: So we went to beg from the Monpa villages. They gave us in small quantities.

Q: Where were you sent for road construction?

#19 JT: In Mon Tawang. It was in Sela and Bomdila that we were engaged in road construction.

Q: Where were they begging for food?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Mon Tawang.

Q: Is that in India?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In India. In Arunachal Pradesh.

Q: Did they beg from Tibetans or Indians?

[Interpreter to interviewer] The people who live in Mon Tawang look like Tibetans. They are more or less like Tibetans. I think they use the same script also.

Q: Can they talk about the road crew? What it was like? What a day was like on the road crew? What they actually did?

#19 JT: Our work was making roads.

#19: We had to dig in the ground and dynamite was used to break the rocks.

#19 JT: Then bulldozers were used.

#19: The men threw away the stones and the women cleared the earth using spades.

#19 JT: Where there were forests, we cut the trees. The Indian government was helping us by paying us wages. We did not have houses to live in, the Indian government provided us with tarpaulins to set up tents, So we lived like that.

Q: How many hours a day did they have to work?

#19 JT: We started at 8 o'clock in the morning and we were let off at 5 o'clock in the evening.

Q: Was it very dangerous?

#19 JT: Yes, it was dangerous. It was not flat ground. It was on the hills and we had to cut trees and dynamite the rocks. When the dynamite was set, we had to speed away. At times the blasts took place suddenly and we lost a few men under the debris. It was very dangerous.

#19: If the blast were to take place here, we would have to speed away up to the area where the office is located there [about half a kilometer].

Q: Were they with their parents at this time?

#19 & #19 JT: Yes, our parents were with us.

#19 JT: Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama spoke with the Indian government about setting up settlements and the Indian government helped us. From the road construction sites, we were gradually sent here.

#19: This was the first settlement. It was a jungle and we cleared the forest. We didn't have houses then. We lived in tents which were set up in rows. We cleared the forest and then the Indian government built houses.

Q: What was it like when they first came to Bylakuppe? What did they think? What was life like for them?

#19 JT: When we first came here, the only clearing was the area for the tents, the rest was a jungle. We were here and the Tibetan government sent officials. Some people were engaged in clearing the forest and some in road construction. After clearing the forest, we made cultivable lands.

#19: After cutting the trees, the Indians would take away the good quality logs. The smaller ones and the leaves were piled and set on fire.

#19 JT: Except for the tent area, it was a jungle.

#19: You know there is something called a bulldozer, which helped make the fields.

Q: Where did they live when they first came here?

#19 JT: The tents were put up at the site where the hospital is located now. It was around that area [points with his finger]. The only clearing was the tent area. Then we cleared the forest and built roads.

Q: Did they build their own house?

#19: The houses were built by the Indian government.

#19 JT: The land was leveled and the houses were built by the Indian government.

Q: Was it very difficult to get used to the weather in India?

#19 JT: At that time it was difficult due to the heat. Then we cleared the forest and it was very scary because there were many elephants.

#19: There were elephants and tigers.

#19 JT: The elephants killed a few of our people, who couldn't escape.

#19: From this camp, two were killed. One person was killed in the New Settlement. In Kollegal one was killed.

Q: Were the elephants kind of wild?

#19: They were wild elephants.

Q: Did they see them? They also saw them?

#19 & #19 JT: Yes, we saw them.

#19 JT: We made fire and beat on tin cans to drive them away. Some ran away while some did not go away easily.

#19: You know the lake near Camp Number 2; they came there to drink water. They sprayed water on their backs with the trunks.

Q: Did they ever meet Tara Rinpoche in the road gang?

#19 JT: We haven't met him.

Q: He visited many of the road gangs.

#19: Two years back, he visited the Namdoling Monastery. The monks made the Long Life Offering, carrying various texts and icons. A lot of laypeople attended. In the morning the people were given bread and tea. At midday, they gave us biscuits and fruit, which were part of the offerings.

Q: When they were in the road crew, how difficult it was, were they able to do any religious practice? Were they able to keep up any of the old traditions at all? Can they talk about that? It must have been very challenging to keep up any of the spiritual traditions under the circumstances. Can they talk about, were they ever visited by monks, were they ever able to organize *pooja*, were they able to do anything like that?

#19 JT: When we were on the road construction work, we did not have any such opportunities.

Q: When did they first get to see His Holiness once they came to India?

#19 JT: At that time we would hear a lot about His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the reincarnation of the Chenrezig. Later I saw him in India, the real Buddha, and received many teachings and I felt very happy and satisfied.

Q: Where did you see him the first time?

#19 JT: I saw him for the first time in 1969 during the first *Kalachakra* [initiation] here.

#19: It was at the palace there [points with finger].

#19 JT: Until 1969 I could not see him.

Q: Was that the first *Kalachakra* [initiation] that they ever attended?

#19 & #19 JT: Yes, it was the first time. That was also the first time we saw him.

Q: For many people probably it was the same.

#19 JT: Yes, it was.

Q: Was it very emotional? Were lots of people crying when they saw His Holiness?

#19 JT: All the old people were shedding tears and crying.

Q: How long did it go on for, this *Kalachakra* ceremony?

#19: It went on for about three days. The preliminary teachings took two days and one day for the final teaching.

Q: Have they heard any news from their village back in Tibet since they left?

#19 JT: Yes, we have heard. A lot of changes have been made there. In my village, both the monasteries were totally destroyed. There have been no reconstructions even now. In some villages, they have given permission to rebuild some monasteries, with a small number of monks. The reincarnation of the Tsona Rinpoche of the Tsona Monastery lives in Arunachal Pradesh and has built the monastery in Bomdila. That is the replacement in India.

Q: Have they visited that?

#19 JT: No, we have not been able to go there. It is very far.

Q: I'd like to ask both of them; first of all I'd like to ask Tsering la, for the new generation of Tibetans who have never seen Tibet, what advice does she have for the new generation of Tibetans?

#19: I would say to the students: you must study well. Do not while away your time playing. If you eat well, you will be energetic and alert. Study hard. You are the seeds who should take back Tibet, our lost country. Study hard.

#19 JT: That is right. Whether the younger generation would listen or not, I would say, with the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the kindness of the Indian government, there are good schools and you have received a wonderful opportunity. Our country has been invaded by the Chinese and we are living here as guests of the Indian government. We do not have permission to stay more than one year at a time. [Cries]

I tell the children that, my relatives' children and children of my friends: you have received a wonderful opportunity. We are living here, but we do not have permission to remain more than one year at a time. This is the Indian government's land and we are living here on rent. Study hard. If you do not have education, you can't face up to the Chinese. Because we had no education earlier, they forcefully took our country. You have to study well. I tell the children all the time. Whether they listen or not, I tell them that they must study well and that they might be happy now but, without education they would have difficulties later on.

Q: Thank you and we will pass this message on in anyway we can.

#19 JT: Okay.

Q: When they were children and very young, I know there's probably a little bit of age difference, did they play together? What did they play if they played together?

#19 JT: When we were little children, there were no schools we could go to, so it was all play. When the weather was very cold and a lot of snow fell, the water turned into ice and we used to play on the ice. We would place a stone on the ice and one child would sit on it and another would push it. Then the boys would play a lot of *aju*. There was a game called *aju*. It was played with the hoof of a sheep. We would also play skipping and hacky-sack.

Q: *Aju*, is what they play with bones?

#19 JT: Yes, bones were colored and polished. The boys played it. Since there were no schools, children just played. Once you were 6, 7 or 8 years old, you had to go to tend the cows. The weather was very cold but in summer it was very nice. Winter was very cold and we would make a fire and sit around it at home and cook *thukpa* 'noodle soup.'

Q: Is he the youngest?

#19 JT: Yes, I am the youngest among the siblings. Now-a-days, as one grows older, I remember my country a lot. I miss it very much.

Q: What does he miss most about Tibet?

#19 JT: As I grow older I remember my village. Even at night, I remember my village and wonder how the talks with China and with the help of the foreigners are progressing. I wait with the hope that we will get our country back. In India, with the grace of His Holiness the

Dalai Lama and the Indian government, we have enough of everything but my mind is not here. I miss my village.

Q: How old is he?

#19 JT: I am 68 years old.

Q: How far is his village from the Indian border? Does he know how many miles?

#19 JT: From Bomdila in Arunachal Pradesh to Tawang is Indian territory. In very early times it was under Tibet. From Tawang, it is just a high mountain pass away. It must be around 90 kilometers.

Q: I am 59 and he looks younger than me.

#19 JT: [Smiles]

Q: Thank you very much and we appreciate their time and for sharing their story with us.

#19: I would like to thank you for your help and working so hard for the cause of the Tibetans.

Q: We are happy to do this.

Q: Just ask either of them if they have anything else they'd like to say?

#19 JT: I request you to please help us by pressuring the Chinese to get independence for Tibet. You have done a lot earlier and I request you to continue to do so until Tibet gets her independence. Please let this be known to all. We pray that you will succeed in whatever work you do.

Q: Thank you very much. We are just two people and we have been working for Tibet for a long time, but there are millions of people all over the world.

#19 JT: Fifteen years! A year is a very long time and still I would like to request, that you please continue to help us until Tibet gets her independence. We pray that you will have success in whatever work you do and for your good health.

Q: We have been doing it for only 15 years and they have been doing it for their whole lives. It is very small what we are doing.

END OF INTERVIEW